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Bangalore Mirror

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Scheme to give eggs, bananas, chikkis in mid-day meals welcome, but why are govt school teachers having to bear financial and logistical fall-out of this?

MORE ON TEACHERS' PLATES

Lack of storage facilities, insufficient funds hit hard

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The state government's ambitious scheme to distribute eggs, bananas, and groundnut chikkis to school children has run into rough weather due to inadequate preparation, causing disruptions to teaching activities and placing additional financial and logistical burdens on teachers. Reports suggest that rising egg prices and challenges in storing bananas and chikkis are adding to teachers' woes.

Introduced last academic year, the programme aims to combat nutritional deficiencies in children by providing high-protein and vitamin-rich food items in their meals. Initially, eggs, bananas, or groundnut chikkis were distributed twice a week with government funding. From September, the Azim Premji Foundation extended support, enabling the distribution of these items six days a week.

"Guidelines mandate that eggs be checked for freshness by immersing them in water, and each chikki must weigh 50 grams. With no lower-grade staff (attenders) in most primary schools, teachers are left to handle these tasks

Primary school teacher

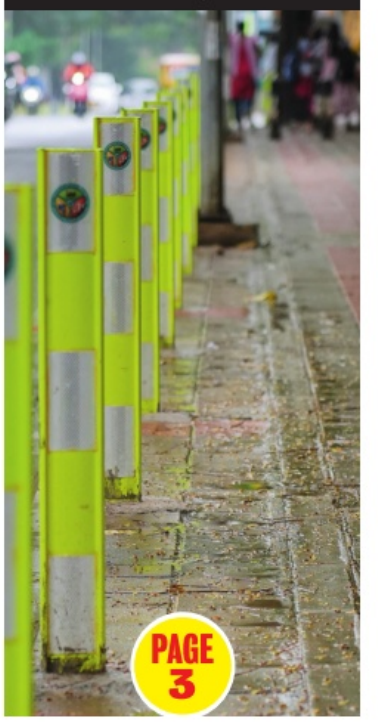
Hole in teachers' pockets

Sources said that currently, the government provides ₹6 per egg, including ₹0.20 for transportation, ₹0.50 for cooking, and ₹0.30 for peeling boiled eggs. However, with egg prices rising, wholesale rates now

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 »

FOOT SOLDIERS

Traffic police implement reflector bollards, safe route to school initiative to reduce risks to pedestrians



PAGE 3

SENSODYNE

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Sensodyne Rapid Relief toothpaste's unique formulation quickly creates a barrier over the sensitive areas of your teeth and **helps beat sensitivity fast*.**

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The underlying cause leading to tooth sensitivity may agravate if not managed. Sensitive teeth may indicate an underlying problem that needs prompt care. If symptoms persist or worsen, see your dentist. *When used as directed on pack, individual results may vary. With twice daily brushing.
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THINGS TO DO

01 Bollywood blast

Madhur Sharma will be performing live in Bangalore. This event promises an exciting evening filled with soulful melodies from one of India's rising stars, known for his work in Bollywood and Indi-pop. **Where: Phoenix Market City, Whitefield; When: December 28, 7 pm**

02 NYE extravaganza

Experience Bengaluru's luxurious NYE extravaganza at the Grand Ballroom, Taj MG road. A dazzling audio-visual treat featuring Bollywood hits & commercial chartbusters by India's rising star DJ, Aadhya Gupta, and one of Bengaluru's very best, DJ Zafiq and many more. **Where: The Grand Ball Room – Taj MG Road; When: December 31, 8 pm onwards**

03 Glow in dark

Get ready for a happening Saturday night. It's Bollywood GLOW IN DARK Music Carnival. Groove to the music by DJ Ronnie & Dean in the mix. Free face painting and free glowsticks for all visitors. **Where: Skydeck by Sherlock's; When: December 28, 9.30 pm**

04 Rambo circus

This award-winning circus is the perfect destination for family entertainment, featuring an array of captivating circus acts that celebrate the best of Indian artistry. Don't miss this spectacular event that promises to enchant audiences of all ages. **Where: St. John's Auditorium; When: Until January 5, different timings**

05 Lols with Shreeja

Trial Show by Shreeja Chaturvedi. It's a show about multiple things: intimate, fun, and nice. But also complex. Attend the show for some laughs and thoughts. **Where: The Mad Bunker, Indiranagar; When: December 24, 8 pm**

Music and dance return to Cubbon Park's bandstand

NGO and Horticulture dept aim to revive beloved tradition; performances on Sunday have kicked off with concerts and choirs; January events lined up

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Flower show and cultural event during the Children's Day celebration at Bandstand Cubbon Park (File photo)

Bengaluru's iconic Cubbon Park is once again alive with music and dance, thanks to a revival of performances at its historic bandstand. HeritageBeku, a non-profit dedicated to preserving the city's cultural and architectural heritage is leading this initiative to bring back a beloved tradition.

The bandstand, located at the heart of Cubbon Park, holds a special place in Bengaluru's history. Originally near Bowring Institute, the structure was later moved to its current spot and renovated a few years ago. For many Bengalureans, it evokes memories of Carnatic and Western music wafting through the park, often performed by military bands in the early 20th century. "We've been working for years to revive this tradition in both Cubbon Park and Lalbagh for the last 4-5 years. While the idea has always been supported, factors like the pandemic and other priorities delayed progress. But this year, during Bengaluru Habba, we're thrilled to see it taking off," said Priya Chetty Rajagopal, a prominent member of HeritageBeku.

Revival through Sunday performances

In collaboration with the Department of Horticulture, HeritageBeku has organised eight performances in December and January. These events kicked off with the Saralaya Sisters' Carnatic music concert on December 8, followed by a Bharatanatyam performance by Aditi S on December 15.

"We started with a small audience of around 100 people, but interest has been growing with each event. This Sunday, December 22, a festive choir will perform Christmas music, followed by a special Veena recital by renowned Vidhwan Shri Balakrishna on December 29," Rajagopal added.

January is set to host even more performances, including Veena concerts by Balu Masti and Odissi dance by Srijanee Chakraborti. The highlight will be the return of the military band on January 26, Republic Day, a tradition that dates back over a century. While the initiative has gained traction, challenges remain. "Funding is an issue, especially for artist honorariums. But many Bengaluru artists have stepped up to perform out of passion, to bring back the city's glory days," Rajagopal said.

> **"We're thrilled to see the tradition taking off this year during Bengaluru Habba** – Priya Chetty Rajagopal, Heritage Beku

HeritageBeku has also reached out to the Karnataka and Kerala General Officer Commanding (GOC) and received positive support. "Lt Gen VK Matthew has kindly confirmed a minimum of four military band performances this year. The band's return is a moment of pride and nostalgia for Bengaluru," she said.

The Department of Horticulture has been instrumental in reviving these performances. Together with HeritageBeku, they aim to establish the bandstand as a hub for Sunday art and music, just as it was in the past.

Rajagopal expresses hope for the future. "We dream of a time when the bandstand is alive every Sunday with music, art, and tradition, uniting Bengalureans just like it did in the early days," she added.

Nexus Koramangala unveils B'luru's biggest Santa in blue

This holiday season, Nexus Koramangala introduces a one-of-a-kind spectacle: the 25-foot "Blue Santa," the biggest of its kind in town. Standing tall and vibrant, this giant Santa is a creative masterpiece that blends traditional craftsmanship with modern flair. What sets it apart is its stunning blue suit, symbolising dreams, mystique, and endless possibilities—making it a refreshing twist on the classic Santa look. The Blue Santa, crafted with intricate clay and fiber molds, is adorned with shimmering acrylic accents and fairy lights, creating a magical winter wonderland that captivates visitors of all ages. Whether it's the glowing details at night or the sheer scale of the installation, this festive marvel promises to enchant everyone. A must-visit for families, friends, and all holiday enthusiasts, the Blue Santa at Nexus Koramangala is the ultimate destination to celebrate Christmas in the heart of the city. Sonar Connectar is the experience partner who has co-curated this thought and brought it to life for Nexus Koramangala this Christmas. **— BMB**

'Despite confirming lack of involvement, PF officials continuing with proceeding'

Former Indian cricketer Robin Uthappa, who faces an arrest warrant for alleged Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) fraud, has said that he had no role in the day-to-day operations of the business and despite confirming the lack of his involvement, the PF officials were continuing with proceedings

He said this on Sunday while reacting to the Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), which functions under the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment, writing a letter to the Bengaluru Police seeking

assistance in issuing an arrest warrant.

Uthappa issued a press statement, which read: "In light of recent news of the PF case against me, I would like to provide some clarification with regards to my involvement with Strawberry Lenceria Pvt Ltd, Centaurus Lifestyle Brands Pvt Ltd, and Berryz Fashion House. In 2018-19, I was appointed as a director in these companies due to my financial contributions to them in the form of loans. However, I did not have an active executive role, nor was I involved in the day-to-day operations of the business. Given my demanding schedule as a professional cricketer, TV presenter, and commentator, neither did I have the time nor expertise to participate in their operations. In fact, I do not play an executive role in any other companies I have funded, till date." **— IANS**

Walk the talk: Pedestrians' safety in spotlight

Pedestrian reflectors, safe route to school programme and more in store to reduce risks to pedestrians

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Pedestrian reflectors have been installed at Malleswaram and 31 other places

The alarming figure of 1,069 accidents involving pedestrians and 217 fatalities reported up to November this year, has pushed the traffic police into taking action to safeguard the streets. Traffic police have installed pedestrian reflectors near Malleshwaram 18th Cross bus stand and 31 other places at the beginning of this month. This and the launch of the first-of-its-kind 'Safe Route to School' programme are aimed at protecting students and other pedestrians.

DCP of West Traffic Anitha Haddannavar said that Malleshwaram was chosen for this project as it is home to many schools.

The 'Safe Route to School Initiative' is a comprehensive plan designed to make commuting safer for students, parents, and school staff.

According to a traffic official, the pedestrian project focuses on safety, traffic efficiency, education, and sustainability.

Traffic efficiency is another important objective, with planned measures to alleviate congestion during peak school hours. Additionally, educational campaigns will empower children, parents, and the public to prioritise safety in their daily commutes.

Transforming school zones

A cornerstone of this initiative is the creation of 'Safe Zones' around schools, typically extending 100-500 metres. Within these zones, traffic rules will be stricter, and infrastructure upgraded.

Measures such as pedestrian pathways, improved road signage, and strict traffic management protocols during peak school hours have been set up in 36 schools. "Our goal is to scale this initiative across more schools in the city, transforming school zones into safer and more pedestrian-friendly environments," Joint Commissioner of Bangalore Traffic Police MN Anucheth explained.

In the tentative plan 32 schools were chosen based on their location, traffic conditions, and the potential for impactful safety enhancements.

According to the Indian Road Congress, there are 32 guidelines for road elements within school zones. It recommends placing school entry gates at a safe distance from busy roads and providing designated pick-and-drop zones to prevent congestion. Clear footpaths with guardrails should be installed along roads, along with marked pedestrian crossings and refuge islands for safe crossing. Cycle tracks and lanes should be provided; public transport facilities must be located away from the school entrance with proper waiting areas. Road markings, signages, and traffic signals should be clear.

> **Our goal is to scale this initiative across more schools in the city, transforming school zones into safer environments**
> –MN Anucheth, Jt Commissioner traffic

Traffic officials explained that the safe zones will feature strategically placed speed breakers and prominently marked zebra crossings, while raised pavement markers and delineators will improve traffic guidance. "Retro-reflective fluorescent sign boards will be installed to signal "School Ahead" zones, indicate speed limits, and mark pedestrian crossings in line with IRC SP: 32 Guidelines. Speed limits within these zones will be reduced to 20-30 km/h during active hours. To alleviate roadside parking chaos, designated drop-off and pick-up zones will be implemented," said an official.

Schools are expected to cooperate by sharing student commute data and creating awareness campaigns to promote safer practices. Traffic officials said the initiative aims to reduce the number of accidents involving children near schools, improve traffic flow by alleviating congestion during peak school hours.

Shaan's electrifying performance at Phoenix Market City

The December air shimmered with festive cheer as Bengaluru welcomed a star who needs no introduction—Shaan, the voice of countless dreams. Straight out of a Bollywood blockbuster, Shaan brought unparalleled energy and dramatic flair to the stage as he performed Main Hoon Don, captivating the audience with his vibrant expressions and dynamic presence.

On December 20, Phoenix Market City in Whitefield came alive with energy as Shaan dressed in festive red and white, the 52-year-old dynamo delivered a high-voltage performance that had the crowd humming, clapping, and dancing along. Produced by Akar Advertising and Marketing Pvt Ltd and Hummingbird Inc., the concert was a true Christmas special filled with surprises, unplugged sets, and electrifying dance numbers.

Shaan opened the night with his signature charisma, launching into Bollywood classics like Chand Sifarish, Deewangi Deewangi, and Main Hoon Don. With every note, he transported the audience back to the golden era of his music, where many relieved their childhood memories. Some fans even recreated nostalgic moments by posting videos of themselves dancing to his songs alongside live clips from the concert.

In an interview with Bangalore Mirror, Shaan expressed his deep connection with Bengaluru, calling the city an inspiration. "From the very first time I came here, I fell in love with the weather and the people. They're so enthusiastic, respectful, charming, and loving. This is the largest crowd I've ever performed for in Bengaluru, and I'm super, super excited!" he shared, his excitement palpable.

The concert was a journey through Shaan's illustrious career. From the romantic ballad Woh Pehli Baar to the peppy Kuch To Hua Hai and the emotional Behti Hawa Sa Tha Woh, every song struck a chord. Shaan also took the audience on a "four stages of love" journey, performing Chaar Kadam and other soulful numbers, making the evening a celebration of love in all its forms. Without a doubt, as Shaan sang, every listener's heart beat went high as he sang My Dil Goes Mmmm.

Adding a local touch, Shaan thrilled Kannada folk music fans by performing Yeno Onthara, earning loud cheers from the crowd. His heartfelt Kannada declaration, "Nan nimmna thumba preethisini" (I love you all very much), cemented his place in the hearts of Bengalureans.

The singer's message to his fans was as heartwarming as his performance. "Just enjoy live music and support live musicians. Bengaluru has always been a city that welcomes performers with love, and I hope that continues," Shaan urged.

For the grand finale, Shaan brought the house down with My Dil Goes Mmmm and Rock N Roll Soniye, leaving everyone dancing and cheering for more.

Reflecting on his journey, Shaan described it as "slow and steady," emphasizing the importance of perseverance in an ever-evolving industry. "Upwards or downwards, whichever way it goes, it's always slow and steady," he said, his humility shining through.

As the night came to a close, Shaan's parting words, "Behti hawa sa tha woh", echoed through the venue, leaving the audience with a warm and nostalgic glow. For everyone present, it was an unforgettable evening—a perfect blend of melody, memories, and Christmas cheer.

—Sanjana CS

1,400+ citizens walk 100 km, exploring B'luru's footpaths

Recent 21.1 km walk in Bengaluru highlights pedestrian infrastructure, promoting fitness and footpath assessments, revealing both well-maintained and challenging areas

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Participants walking on the footpath near Swami Vivekananda Metro Station on Old Madras Road

A 21.1 km walk on footpaths was conducted in Bengaluru on Saturday. Over 50 participants started the walk, and 36 completed the entire route of 21.1 km, the remaining 15 walkers completed between 10 km and 15 km. This was the finale of BLRWalkFest, where over 1,400 citizens had walked over 100 km of interconnected footpaths over 13 walks between December 1 and 15 as part of Bengaluru Habba.

The BLRWalkFest is curated and designed by BangaloreWALKS and is supported by BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike), BMRCL (Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited) and Traffic Police and is arguably the largest organised mass public participation program where pedestrian infrastructure is tested and evaluated by citizens. This programme with the tagline "Health, Heritage, Happiness" is designed to help citizens achieve their fitness goals by walking a minimum of 10,000 steps on the footpaths and also a way to assess the health of the city's footpaths through actual usage.

Arun Pai, founder of BangaloreWALKS, who curates these footpath walks said, "We successfully conducted 2 Public Footpath Runs, the 10 km run on October 2 and the 11 km Rajyotsava Run on November 1, where over 125 people participated and showed that the footpaths were safe to run on. These runs were conducted in partnership with BBMP who ensured the 21kms selected were largely obstacle-free. Based on this response, we organised the BLRWalkFest from Dec 1 to 15 to coincide with BLR Habba and offered daily walks of a minimum of 10,000 steps each on non-overlapping routes to cover 100kms of inter-connected footpaths."

The 21.1 km route started at Baiyappanahalli Metro and followed the Metro Purple line to Majestic with a few diversions. On the return loop, the route went past Cantonment Station, Halasuru Lake and ended at Trinity Circle MG Road. The incredible aspect of the walk was that none of the 50 walkers had ever walked 21 km before, most had barely ever walked more than 10 km, and some had never walked more than 5 km.

> **"I never walked more than 5km. The enthusiasm and energy of people helped us to complete marathon. It was fun event** – Latha S, participant

The walk route passed through the East and West Zones of BBMP covering the constituencies of CV Raman Nagar, Shanthi Nagar, Shivaji Nagar and Gandhinagar, officers and staff from BBMP from each of these constituencies met and accompanied the walkers. Latha Srinivasan, one of the participants, appreciated the event organisers, noting that the walk started at 7 am and ended at 2 pm. "I never walked more than 5 km. The enthusiasm and energy of people helped us to complete the marathon. It was a fun event. Most of the roads have footpaths but they need improvement," said Latha Srinivasan.

Walker ratings

There were fewer than 10 obstacles on the 21km route where walkers had to leave the footpath. Over 90% of the footpaths were clean and walkable. The widest footpaths discovered were Majestic: 12-lane, Old Madras Road: 8-lane, and KG Road: 8-lane. Stating that the marathon was a challenge, Ashok Gulati, a resident from Indiranagar, said that he thought walking on the footpath was not an easy task but found most of the footpaths were pedestrian-friendly but needed some improvement.

After long delays, Goshala Road gets green light for asphalting

Contractor resumed asphalting work after hundreds of calls and public pressure

The long-awaited asphalting of Goshala Road has finally begun after over two years of delays and persistent follow-ups by residents and civic groups. According to the Mahadevpura Task Force (MTF), the work order for the project was issued to the BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike) contractor in 2022, but progress was stalled due to payment disputes and additional infrastructure work undertaken by the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB).

BWSSB's underground drainage (UGD) pipeline installation, initiated as part of the broader infrastructure improvement, further deteriorated the road's condition, leaving it nearly unusable for commuters. "This road has become a nightmare for residents and motorists alike. Despite multiple promises, there was no action for years," a resident said.

Members of MTF revealed that the situation worsened when the BBMP failed to make timely payments to its contractors. According to the Mahadevapura Task Force, contractors had not received payments for over two years, and when payments were made, they amounted to only 75% of the billed amount. This financial strain led to significant delays in resuming work on the road. After hundreds of follow-up calls, written notices, and mounting public pressure, the contractor has finally restarted the asphalting work, which commenced during night hours to expedite completion. "We have been tirelessly pushing for this project's resumption. It's been a collective effort to ensure that the roadwork is finally progressing," said a representative of the Mahadevapura Task Force. Mahadevapura MLA Manjula Aravind Limbavali is said to have actively monitored the situation and ensured that work resumed amidst numerous challenges. Residents hope her continued involvement will expedite the completion of other pending infrastructure projects in the constituency.

"We hope this work is completed without further interruptions. The payment issues between BBMP and its contractors must also be resolved to prevent such delays in future projects," added the task force representative. The long delay in asphalting Goshala Road caused significant inconvenience to all of us," The road was in terrible condition, and with BWSSB's pipeline work leaving it worse, commuting became a daily struggle. Such delays in infrastructure projects create unnecessary problems for residents, from safety risks to increased commuting time. We hope the authorities ensure timely completion of this and other pending projects in the future."

— BMB

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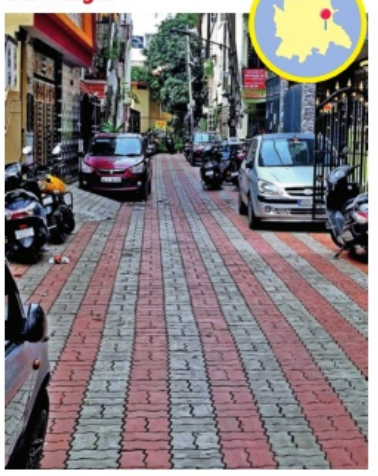
Kiosk neglected

Madhav Nagar

The rundown kiosk shadow house on Kumar Krupa Junction Road in Madhav Nagar Layout.

Parking chaos

SG Palya



Residents near 28, 1st Cross, Bharathi Layout, SG Palya, face parking woes as students from nearby institute block access with roadside parking.

Lake disrepair

Kithaganur Lake

Kithaganur Lake near TC Palya in Srinivasa Layout is neglected, with its water drained, leaving it dry and uncleared.

Farmer suicide rate drops in K'taka

State's distress cases have decreased to 346 this year, but farmer associations call for deeper government action on persistent issues

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Ksheeradhara program, an incentive to farmers, is stalled

Farmer suicides in Karnataka have declined significantly in the current financial year (2024-25), with 346 cases reported compared to 922 in 2022-23 and 1,061 in 2023-24. While the government attributes this reduction to proactive measures, farmer associations highlight ongoing challenges that need attention.

Government's initiatives driving change

The Karnataka government attributes the decline to strategic interventions aimed at reducing financial burdens and fostering agricultural resilience. Delayed loan recoveries have provided farmers with crucial breathing room to manage debts. Additionally, timely subsidies for seeds and fertilisers ensured access to essential resources, enabling farmers to sustain their livelihoods without falling into further financial distress. Campaigns promoting sustainable farming practices have also encouraged innovation and adaptation.

Favourable rainfall this year contributed significantly to better crop yields, complementing government efforts. Unlike previous years, these measures were not perceived as temporary relief but as comprehensive strategies addressing both immediate and long-term challenges. The government sees this as a reflection of its commitment to alleviating agrarian distress and empowering farmers.

Farmer associations highlight gaps

Despite these developments, farmer organisations argue that the government has not adequately addressed the daily struggles faced by the farming community. Kurubur Shantakumar, President of the State Farmers' Organisation Federation, has raised concerns over the discontinuation of vital schemes.

The Ksheeradhara program, which provided ₹5 per litre as an incentive to dairy farmers, has been stalled, with payments delayed for over nine months, affecting around 38 lakh dairy farmers, most of whom are women. Similarly, the Mukhyamantri Raitha Vidya Nidhi Scholarship, aimed at supporting farmers' children with financial aid of ₹2,500 to ₹11,000 for higher education, has seen inconsistent implementation, raising doubts about its continuity.

> **"The government must focus on the causes of farmers' distress and ensure schemes are implemented"**
>
> —K Shantakumar, SFOF

Shantakumar also criticised the limited accessibility of existing schemes and the increasing difficulty farmers face in securing loans. He emphasised the need for the government to address systemic issues, stating, "The government must focus on the root causes of farmers' distress and ensure schemes are effectively implemented."

While the decline in farmer suicides offers a narrative of hope, both the government and farmer associations agree that sustained efforts are essential. Addressing the structural challenges and ensuring the effective execution of welfare programs can pave the way for long-term agricultural stability and resilience in Karnataka.

High-tech brothel operator arrested

Bengaluru's Central Crime Branch (CCB) Women's Protection Squad arrested an individual under the stringent Karnataka Goonda Act for operating a high-tech brothel and engaging in human trafficking.

Anil Kumar V, also known as Anil Reddy, a resident of Bengaluru, has been accused of luring foreign and out-of-state women by promising them high-paying self-employment opportunities. The women were held in illegal custody and coerced into prostitution. Authorities revealed that Anil used sophisticated tactics to target vulnerable women, leveraging technology and fraudulent promises to operate his illicit trade across regions.

The accused has a history of serious offences, with four criminal cases registered against him. These include charges of human trafficking and rape filed in Andhra Pradesh and at Bengaluru's Mahadevapura police station. Despite his criminal record, Anil continued running professional brothels. Acting on a proposal submitted by officials from Mahadevapura Police Station and the CCB, the Bengaluru City Police Commissioner issued an order on December 20 for Anil's detention under the Karnataka Goonda Act. The Women's Protection Squad executed the arrest order the following day and transferred him to Ballari Jail on December 21. —BMB

Bengaluru 2nd in metro forest growth

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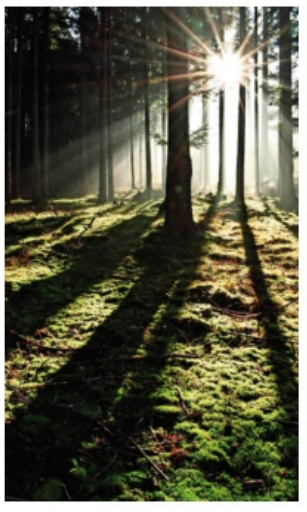

According to the India State of Forest Report-2023, Bengaluru has recorded a 0.59% increase in forest cover, compared to the previous assessment in 2021. The city now boasts a total forest cover of 89.61 square kilometres, making it one of the greenest metros in India, following Delhi (194.15 km²) and Mumbai (110.84 km²). This marks a growth of 2.09 km² in forest cover during the assessment period, placing Bengaluru second in urban forest gains among Indian cities, after Ahmedabad, which added 5.48 km². However, cities like Chennai and Hyderabad reported significant losses in forest cover, with reductions of 2.64 km² and 1.61 km², respectively.

According to the report, the forest distribution in Bengaluru Urban reveals that 25.65 km² is categorised as Moderately Dense Forest (MDF), 258.63 km² as Open Forest (OF), and 24.09 km² as Scrub Forest. The city, however, does not have any "Very Dense Forest" areas with canopy density exceeding 70%. Despite this improvement in forest cover, forest fires have emerged as a growing concern. Bengaluru Urban recorded 51 forest fire incidents in 2023-24, up from 44 in 2022-23, while Bengaluru Rural reported a decline in such incidents, with cases dropping from 169 in 2022-23 to 124 in 2023-24.

"At the state level, Karnataka has a forest cover of 1,91,791 square kilometres, which constitutes 19.96% of its geographical area. While the state witnessed a decline of 459.36 km² in its overall forest and tree cover, it remains one of the leading contributors to agroforestry in India, with a growing stock of 98.31 million cubic meters. Despite this setback, Karnataka has also seen a notable increase of 93.14 km² in forest cover within the Reserved Forest Area (RFA) since the last survey, reflecting focused efforts in protected zones," the report stated.

Nationally, the survey highlights a mixed trend in forest cover across states. While states like Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh recorded significant increases, Madhya Pradesh reported the highest loss, with a reduction of 612.41 km². "For Bengaluru, the findings stress the importance of sustained efforts to protect and expand its green spaces amid rapid urbanisation, ensuring a healthier and more sustainable environment for its residents," said an official.

Between 2013 and 2023, significant improvements were observed in various forestry parameters across the country, showcasing positive trends in forest and ecological management. The national forest cover expanded by 16,630.25 km², with 440.47 km² of this increase occurring within Recorded Forest Areas/Government Woodlands (RFA/GW) and 16,189.78 km² outside these areas. In addition, forest cover in hill districts grew by 2,649.04 km². Mangrove cover recorded a growth of 296.33 km², while tree cover saw an increase of 20,747.34 km². Overall, the growing stock in forests and Trees Outside Forests (TOF) increased, the report said.

Kunal Ganjawala's hit show at Garuda Shopping Festival

Kunal Ganjawala's soulful melodies at Alive India in Concert Season 10, presented by Karma & Curry, turned the Garuda Shopping Festival into more than just a concert it became a symphony of purpose, uniting music lovers under the banner of Alive India's mission to inspire and empower budding talent.

On December 21 at 7 pm, the crowd erupted as Kunal Ganjawala took centre stage, starting with his Kannada hit Neene Neene. Seamlessly transitioning between Kannada favourites like Kushiyagide Neena Kanda and Bollywood chartbusters like Humdum Suniyo Re and Salaam Namaste Dil Na Diya, Kunal captivated the audience.

The show opened with Supratik Ghosh, the charismatic lead singer of Aurko and founder of Alive India. Performing evergreen classics like Jab Koi Baat and Chookar Mere Man Ko, Supratik paid a moving tribute to Mohammed Rafi, bringing the crowd to its feet during Gulabi Aankhein. He also introduced Alive India's impactful "Roti, Kapda, Makaan, Rozgaar" initiative, inspiring budding musicians to chase their dreams.

The evening took an emotional turn as Kunal Ganjawala paid a touching tribute to the late KK with heartfelt renditions of Zara Si Dil Mein, Kyon Aaj Kal, and Tu Hi Meri Shab Hai. The audience, visibly moved, expressed their admiration with thunderous applause, honouring the legacy of both artists. Kunal concluded his performance with his timeless classic Bheege Honth Tere, leaving the crowd spellbound.

The night wasn't just about music; it was a Concert for a Cause. Proceeds from the event supported Alive India's mission to uplift young talent, making every attendee a part of the movement.

Company secretaries: Get all hands on deck

Institute ties up with Bangalore University to raise awareness about job opportunities available for CS students in state

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There are around 200 vacancies of company secretaries in the state, and an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 vacancies in the country

The Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) Bengaluru Chapter is set to create awareness among college students on the opportunities available for company secretaries in the country. The ICSI has already signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bangalore University. There are around 200 vacancies of company secretaries in Karnataka, while the number of vacancies across the country is estimated to be 2,000 to 3,000.

"There is a lot of scope for job opportunities for college students. The problem with the college or PU students is a lack of awareness of the opportunities to work as company secretaries. We have chalked out a plan to visit colleges to create awareness among the students. Our target is to interact with 2,000 students in one year," said Venkata Subbarao Kalva, president, ICSI Bengaluru Chapter.

He said the company secretary plays a vital role in corporate governance. "A practicing company secretary needs five to six articles (candidates undergoing articleship). There are many vacancies for company secretary posts at various corporate companies," he added.

He also said the ICSI Bengaluru Chapter has been working hard to have an arbitration centre in Bengaluru on the lines of the arbitration centre at Noida. "On an average, 30 to 50 disputes are arising between companies and companies or consumers in Bengaluru. In the absence of an arbitration centre here, the complainants have to go to the National Company Law Tribunal, New Delhi. I want the NCLT and the jurisdictional courts to refer the disputes to an arbitration centre for an amicable solution," he said.

"We have chalked out a plan to visit colleges to create awareness among the students. We aim to talk to 2,000 students in 1 year – Venkata Kalva, ICSI

As per the MoU, Bangalore University will accord its necessary recognition to Company Secretary Qualification as equivalent to Post Graduate Degree for the purpose of admission to PhD in management/commerce and allied programmes at Bangalore University, subject to their equivalency by Association of Indian Universities, New Delhi, and Statutory bodies, as in force from time to time.

The ICSI, on its part, would facilitate the conduct of specialised training programmes in Bangalore University for the faculty members, research scholars, and students of Bangalore University on areas of mutual interest by providing experts on its roles. It may nominate ICSI members for academic councils or other academic bodies of the university as it deems appropriate. It would share the expertise of its faculty members as mutually desirable by way of acting as resource persons for training programs or workshops and seminars organised by the ICSI.

Meanwhile, former chief minister and Member of Parliament Basavaraj Bommai attended the ICSI Excellence National Awards in Corporate Governance held at ITC Gardenia and released books on the role of company secretaries.

Consult employers in wage revision: HC

Bench overturns 2023 order; noting that employers are directly impacted by revisions

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The Karnataka High Court has emphasised that employers, being key stakeholders affected by wage revisions, must be consulted before the government issues notifications regarding minimum wages. This ruling came from a division bench comprising Chief Justice NV Anjaria and Justice KV Aravind whilst allowing an appeal by various employers' groups, including the Karnataka Employers Association.

The bench, while overturning a single judge's order from September 26, 2023, stated that employers are crucial stakeholders whose obligations are directly impacted by minimum wage revisions.

They noted that various factors influence the final notification, making it essential for employers to present their position. The government had issued a notification on July 28 under Sections 3 and 5 of the Minimum Wages Act 1948, revising wages for foundry employments. The single judge had nullified this notification whilst considering petitions from trade unions, including the All India Trade Union Congress.

Unfairly excluded

The appellant employers' association argued they were unfairly excluded from the single judge proceedings despite their prior representations to the Advisory Board. They also highlighted that the trade unions' demand for a living wage differs significantly from minimum wage considerations. The employee unions contested that Sections 3 and 5 make no distinction between fixing and revising wages, arguing that the notification was legislative in nature, making a hearing unnecessary.

Statutory exercise

The bench determined that whilst the notification could be considered subordinate legislation, the process leading to it involves statutory exercise requiring reasonable implementation. They emphasised that natural justice principles are integral to such statutory procedures. The court concluded that excluding employers from the process would render the exercise unjust and arbitrary. They directed that the matter be returned to the single judge for fresh consideration, with instructions to hear the appellants' arguments. The entire process must be completed within 10 weeks.

"Excluding employers from the process would render the exercise unjust and arbitrary. The matter may be returned to the single judge for fresh consideration – HC bench

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Karnataka Legislative Assembly Speaker UT Khader conducts proceedings during the winter session at Suvarna Soudha in Belagavi

Words of wisdom

In the latest Assembly session, Speaker UT Khader dropped some wisdom on the members. He pointed out that some were calling attention and then sneaking out of the session. "If you want to stick around and stay relevant as an MLA, you need to be present, participate, and listen—not just speak and exit stage," he said. He made an interesting comparison, saying, "If you want to become a doctor, there's a medical college for that. Want to be an engineer? No problem; there's a top-notch engineering college. Want to be a lawyer? Plenty of law schools. But there's no 'school' for becoming a great politician. That's what the legislature session is for."

Poetic reply

Former MLA BL Shankar recalled an interesting anecdote. He said when Kuvempu was served a notice regarding Karnataka's unification, he boldly responded not with words, but through poetry, showcasing his courage. "Writers have the power to mock the arrogance of politicians and use poetry to convey how they should behave. Writers like Bendre, Kuvempu and Govinda Pai brought social issues to the forefront. Many writings by women like Triveni, Nirupama, and Mallikaghanti have had a significant impact on women's equality," he remarked during Kannada Sahitya Sammelana.

Garbage mafia

In Bengaluru, there's a massive waste management mafia operating, with fake records and threats flying around like confetti. For the past one and a half years, no one's been able to fix this mess. But, no matter what anyone says, Dy CM DK Shivakumar announced that a waste management unit will be set up on a 100-acre plot in each of the city's four corners. During the recent session, DK Shivakumar said that nobody's been able to rein in this garbage mafia. The people handling waste disposal have turned it into their own mafia, using threats like, "If you tighten things up, the garbage won't go anywhere." To "develop" these units, Rs 200 crore has been collected, but the power-generation plants from the waste are not even working. He stated that only a Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000 crore investment would make these units run properly.

Forest trouble

In a surprising turn of events, the Regional Commissioner issued a late-night order instructing officials to avoid participating in the joint survey related to forest land encroachments, allegedly involving former Speaker Ramesh Kumar. This decision comes after the Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF) issued notices to relevant officials to take part in the survey, which was set up to identify forest land boundaries. The sudden order from the Regional Commissioner clarified that the ACF does not have the authority to issue notices for a joint survey, nor are they considered competent enough to do so. The letter further directed that no actions should be taken based on the notices issued by the DFO, and that these notices should not be considered.

Why do writers see politicians as untouchables?

"Leaving politics to focus on writing is impossible." This is what Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil lamented, saying that writers often view politicians as untouchables. Speaking on 'Politics in Literature' at the Literature Conference, he raised the question, "Why aren't the works of politicians considered as literature? Why shouldn't what is said in the Legislative Assembly and Council be considered literature? Through literature, politics can be transformed, and Lankesh proved that. Those in the literary field should not just do politics but offer guidance. Gandhi was both a politician and a writer. No one ever disregarded his writings," he added.

— Sridhar Vivan

Old Madras Road may soon be smooth ride to Chennai

Gadkari says old Bengaluru-Chennai expressway to be four-laned

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In a major update for those staying in east Benglauru, they can soon plan to travel to Chennai via Old Madras Road which is now being upgraded as a four-lane highway. Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari recently said the Centre has sanctioned₹1,338 crore for an access-controlled highway project on NH-40, spanning 28 km from Walajapet/Ranipet to the Tamil Nadu-Andhra Pradesh border. This means that the entire stretch of old Madras road from Bengaluru City to Chennai via Ranipet will be a four-laned one.

Currently, the road from Hoskote to Chittoor is a four-lane highway and the road from Chittoor to Andhra Pradesh-Tamil Nadu border is being four-laned. However, the major bottleneck between the AP/TN border to Walajahpet is two-laned and from there it is a four-lane road till Chennai. Gadkari said, "This corridor will enhance connectivity between Bengaluru and Chennai It will stimulate local industries, including leather and small-scale engineering units supporting BHEL."

"The highway will feature a 4-lane carriageway with paved shoulders and 2-lane service roads on both sides. A 10-km bypass for Walajapet/ Ranipet, 4 bridges, 2 rail over-bridges are also planned

Many travellers between Bengaluru and Chennai have differing preferences for the best route. While the Hosur Road is favored by many for its four to six-lane highway and the convenience of crossing only two states, others find the Old Madras Road more suitable, especially for residents near KR Puram and Hoskote. Currently, an expressway between Bengaluru to Chennai is in progress. Vasu Chinna, a frequent traveler, explained, "The Hosur Road is a popular choice as it offers a consistent four to six-lane stretch all the way to Chennai. Additionally, it crosses only two states, unlike the Old Madras Road, which passes through three states, including Andhra Pradesh. However, having an alternative highway via Chittoor would be a good idea. However, for people living around KR Puram and Hoskote, the Old Madras Road is easier to access and offers a shorter route to Chennai."

Currently, four major roads connect Bengaluru to Chennai. The Old Madras Road stretches 333 km, the Hosur Road spans 346 km, the road via Pernambut measures 327 km, and a new 258 km expressway under construction will link Hoskote to Sriperumbudur near Chennai via a greenfield alignment. Ananya Keshav, a regular traveller, stressed the importance of having multiple highways between two bustling cities but raised concerns about maintenance. "The current highway in Tamil Nadu is in poor condition, making travel challenging," she said.

Have proof of invective use: CM

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday said audio and video evidence exists to prove that BJP MLC CT Ravi used invective against Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar on the floor of the Legislative Council on December 19.

The CM further said several MLCs witnessed the incident.

"We are getting the matter investigated because it constitutes a criminal offense. Then why is he (Ravi) asking for judicial inquiry?" Siddaramaiah wondered.

"There is audio and video evidence of him using derogatory language. Many MLCs heard him. It amounts to criminal offense, isn't it?" he asked.

Siddaramaiah termed the actions of the senior BJP leader as "highly condemnable".

Ravi was arrested for allegedly using abusive language against the Woman and Child Development Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar inside the Council on the concluding day of the winter session of state legislature in Belagavi on December 19.

Ravi questions rationale

Meanwhile CT Ravi has questioned the rationale behind his recent arrest and multiple transfers across four districts. Expressing confidence in public support, he raised concerns over the security arrangements, criticizing the government's claim of "security reasons" for his relocation.

Ravi told ANI that while providing security in a police station is challenging, ensuring safety in isolated locations seems easier for the state government. "The public is in our support...They are standing with me... Why was I arrested? Why was I continuously shifted to four districts? CM says that due to security reasons they did this...Giving security in PS is difficult for them, but giving security at an isolated place is easy for them," the BJP leader said. **Agencies**

BM Finance Fundas

#Burden: Electricity distribution companies (DISCOMs) continue to remain a drag on State finances: RBI

New deadline for UAN activation and linking bank account to Aadhaar for ELI benefits

The Employee Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has extended the deadline to January 15, 2024, for UAN activation and seeding of your bank account with Aadhaar for availing of the benefits under the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) Scheme. While the original deadline was November 30, 2024, it was subsequently extended to December 15, 2024, and now the deadline has been extended again.

Activation of Universal Account Number (UAN) and seeding of an Aadhaar to a bank account is a must for employees who wish to claim the monetary benefits of the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme, which is administered through EPFO. This mandatory exercise needs to be completed, if you want to get the benefits of the ELI scheme. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced this new scheme during the Union Budget 2024 in July and there are three types of ELI schemes (A, B, and C).

"Please see the circulars cited. In this connection, the competent authority has granted an extension of timeline from 15.12.2024 to 15.01.2025 for UAN activation and Aadhaar seeding in bank accounts of all the employees," said EPFO in a circular dated December 20, 2024.

Why should you link Aadhaar with a bank account for ELI benefits?

The ELI money is to be credited using the direct benefit transfer mode (DBT) hence the reason why Aadhaar needs to be linked with the bank account. The Ministry of Labour and Employment said in a dated November 22, 2024, "Since the benefits under the EmploymentLinked Incentive (ELI) scheme, will be disbursed through Direct Benet Transfer (DBT) to eligible employees, Employers are urged to ensure UAN activation and Aadhaar seeding in Bank Account.....in respect of all their employees who have joined in the current financial year, starting with the latest joinees."

The Ministry earlier stated: "Every subscriber of EPFO is required to have an Aadhaar-linked Universal Account Number (UAN), which needs to be activated by creating a login on the Member Portal, for availing a number of facilities through a single window. Such facilities include the ability to view and download PF passbooks; submit online claims for withdrawals, advances, or transfers; update personal details and track the status of claims in real-time. The activation process is straightforward and can be completed using an Aadhaar-based OTP."

Employment Linked Incentive scheme

There are three ELI schemes (A, B, and C). According to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget 2024 speech, Scheme A will focus on first-timers joining the Employment and Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) scheme as well, Scheme B focuses on job-creation in manufacturing and Scheme C will focus on the support to the employers.

Scheme A of the ELI scheme will provide a one-month wage to all the people newly entering the workforce in all formal sectors. The direct benefit transfer of one month's salary in three instalments to first-time employees, as registered in the EPFO, will be up to Rs 15,000. The eligibility limit will be a salary up to Rs 1 lakh per month. Scheme B will incentivize additional employment in the manufacturing sector. An incentive will be provided at a scale directly both to the employee and the employer with respect to their EPFO contribution in the first four years of employment.

Scheme C will cover additional employment in all sectors. All additional employment within a salary of Rs1 lakh per month will be counted. The government will reimburse employers up to Rs 3,000 per month for two years towards their EPFO contribution for each employee.

By Neelanjit Das, ET Online

Women in boardrooms: Representation highs, harassment reporting lows

Study finds number of companies without women independent directors has gone down to 5 this year as compared to 21 in 2021

The boardroom representation of women in India's leading 100 corporations has demonstrated significant advancement over the past four years, according to a recent assessment. By March 2024, the number of companies without women independent directors decreased to five, down from 21 in 2021.

Independent directors serve as non-executive members who enhance corporate governance practices. The Companies Act 2013 requires boards to include at least one woman director, whilst SEBI's LODR regulations stipulate the presence of at least one woman independent director.

Excellence Enablers, a Delhi-based corporate governance consultancy, conducted the 'Survey on Corporate Governance'.

The study evaluated the top 100 organisations through annual reports and NIFTY indices, examining various aspects including board structure, diversity, committee tenure, remuneration, and social responsibility from 2021 to 2024.

The survey's top 100 list encompasses PSUs, banks, PSBs, and insurance organisations. Although specific company details were not disclosed in the analysis, the survey's disclaimer referenced organisations such as Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, Life Insurance Corporation of India, Canara Bank, HDFC Bank, and Punjab National Bank.

The count of companies lacking women independent directors (ID) decreased from 21 in 2021 (including 12 PSUs and 3 PSBs) to five in 2024 (comprising four PSUs and one PSB). Women's presence in senior leadership positions has also increased. According to the survey, five companies had women managing directors (MD) and chairpersons in 2024, up from two in 2021.

"The absence of complaints would seem to indicate either an ideal workplace or a lack of confidence among employees in reporting cases of this nature

However, consistent representation remains limited. The survey also indicated that 15 companies maintained women in key managerial positions during the four-year period.

The assessment revealed mixed results regarding women's board representation while highlighting concerns about transparency in sexual harassment reporting.

The POSH Act (Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal Act, 2013), alongside The Companies Act and SEBI LODR regulations, requires organisations to document and track harassment incidents and their resolutions.

Statistics showed 1,622 reported incidents in 2024, with 1,464 cases resolved, marking an increase from 2021's figures of 660 reports and 554 resolutions.

Workplace safety reporting demonstrates significant inconsistencies across organisations. Notably, over 20 firms reported zero incidents across four years.

"The absence of complaints would seem to indicate either an ideal workplace or a lack of confidence among employees in reporting cases of this nature," the report stated. Additional concerns include perfunctory case handling and insufficient disciplinary actions.

One organisation consistently reported the highest incidents across all four years, reaching 182 cases in 2024. Their resolution rates fluctuated between 76% and 89% during this period.

The assessment identified significant knowledge gaps amongst organisations regarding POSH Act violations and inappropriate workplace conduct. It advocated for increased training sessions and awareness initiatives, which are mandatory requirements under the POSH Act.

–Rachana Ramesh

Traffic advisory for Mall of Asia

The North Traffic Police issued an advisory on X, alerting commuters about heavy footfall and full parking facilities at the Mall of Asia.

The advisory warned of slow-moving traffic in the area and announced that microphone licences and public programmes scheduled post-evening will not be permitted until after New Year.

Higher police officials attributed the congestion to the ongoing Christmas and New Year celebrations, which have significantly increased the number of visitors to the mall.

To manage the situation, authorities have decided to withhold post-evening microphone licences for events at the Mall of Asia, ensuring smoother traffic movement during peak hours.

DCP Traffic North Siri Gowri posted an advisory on X, stating, "Slow moving traffic near Mall of Asia and in front of Orion Mall due to heavy pedestrian and two-wheeler footfall. Commuters, please take note."

Adding to the traffic woes, white-topping work is currently underway in the vicinity, further resulting in delays.

Commuters have been urged to plan their travel accordingly and consider alternative routes to avoid inconvenience.

Drunken tiff leads to murder

A 30-year-old man was arrested by the Madanayakanahalli police on Tuesday for murdering his friend, who was also his landlord, over a trivial row.

The accused has been identified as Chetan (30), a private firm employee, who was friends with the deceased identified as Pradeep (41). According to the police, the duo were drinking partners and Pradeep had given the accused a portion of the 4-storeyed house he owned to stay.

The duo used to drink together and Pradeep used to pee in the house. On Tuesday night when Pradeep was intoxicated, he did the same, which enraged Chetan and he banged his head against the wall.

The tenants around said to the police that the TV volume may have been raised by Chetan so that the neighbours couldn't hear Pradeep scream. The police also discovered several burn marks on Pradeep's body.

The police tracked down Chetan from Salem who fled the scene after discovering that Pradeep was dead, and a case has been registered. Further investigations are underway

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I Kamlesh Yadav Kumari W/O, Ran Singh Yadav R/o A101, Rose Garden Apartment, Yelahanka Service Road, Yelahanka Old Town, Bangalore -64 have changed my name to Kamlesh Yadav

I Prashant Zande S/O, Chandrashekhar Zende R/o Room No 2065, Tower 2, Prestige Bagamane Temple Bells, Rr Nagar, Bengaluru have changed my name to Prashant Zende.

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Centralised mode of supply may help, say teachers

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

stand at ₹6.60 per egg, while retail prices have reached ₹7.50. This forces teachers to pay an additional ₹1.50 per egg out of pocket. In schools with 50 students, this adds up to an extra ₹1,500 monthly, significantly cutting into teachers' salaries.

Storage issues

For students who don't eat eggs, the government mandates the distribution of bananas or groundnut chikkis. However, storing bananas in school facilities without spoilage is a major challenge. Teachers complain about the daily struggle to procure fresh bananas from the market, detracting from their teaching responsibilities. Similarly, while groundnut chikkis are purchased from markets, inadequate storage facilities in many schools lead to spoilage, creating additional waste and costs. Although mid-day meal staff are present in schools, most lack the resources or skills to prepare and manage chikkis effectively.

Call for centralised supply chain

Teachers are urging the government to adopt a centralised approach for supplying eggs, bananas, and chikkis, similar to how ragi malt and milk are provided through contracted agencies. This would alleviate the logistical and financial burdens on teachers, allowing them to focus on teaching instead of managing nutrition distribution, they said.

A teacher said, "Strict guidelines mandate that eggs must be checked for freshness by immersing them in water, and each chikki must weigh 50 grams. With no lower-grade staff (attenders) in most primary schools, teachers are left to handle these tasks, cutting into their teaching hours.

Hence, we are appealing to the government to implement the scheme in a way that doesn't overburden teachers."

Government to address teachers' concerns

Kolar District Government Employees' Association President A Ajaykumar assured that efforts are underway to bring these issues to the government's attention. "We will ensure the problems faced by teachers are resolved," he said.

Echoing this sentiment, Narsimhamurthy, another representative, added, "The rising cost of eggs and challenges in storing bananas and chikkis have created significant hardships for teachers. We urge the government to manage the distribution through separate agencies to ease this burden."

HEALTH TIP: Ovarian cysts are fluid-filled sacs that form on or within an ovary

Lemon, ginger and honey tea helps clear the sinuses and boost immunity

BangaloreMirror | 9
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All you need to know about...

Faster walking

Good walk
If your walking speed is faster than your peers, you may be at a lower risk of metabolic conditions such as diabetes or cardiovascular ones, a recent study has found.

God speed
In nearly 25,000 participants having obesity, a high waist circumference, or both, researchers from Japan's Doshisha University measured their 'subjective walking speed' through a single question in a health questionnaire -- "Is your walking speed faster than that of your age and sex?"

Lowers risk
The results, published in the journal Scientific Reports, showed that individuals who identified as 'faster walkers' had significantly lower risks of diabetes -- about 30 per cent lower -- and smaller, but notable reductions, in risks of hypertension and dyslipidemia (abnormal lipid levels in blood). The researchers attributed the findings to the relationship between walking speed and overall health.

Advantages
Faster walkers often display better cardiorespiratory fitness, which is in turn related to lower levels of inflammation and oxidative stress -- two key drivers of metabolic diseases, they said. In the study group, 8,578 individuals had obesity (measured by body mass index), 9,626 had a high waist circumference, and 6,742 had both.

"This study clarified that even individuals with obesity, who are at higher risk for metabolic diseases, have lower odds of hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and dyslipidemia if they report a fast subjective walking speed," lead researcher Kojiro Ishii, a professor in the faculty of health and sports science at Doshisha University, said. The authors explained that 'subjective walking speed' is self-reported and can be readily incorporated into standard examinations, unlike 'objective walking speed', which needs resources, time, and space to assess. —PTI

HOLIDAY SPECIAL LOOT

How to avoid the latest generation of scams this holiday season

Imagine this: Two days before your family holiday party, you get a text about an online order you placed a week ago, saying the package is at your door. It comes with a photo – of someone else's door. When you click the attached link, it takes you to the online store, where you enter your username and password. Somehow that doesn't work, even though you answered your security questions.

Frustrated, you call customer service. They tell you not to worry since your package is still on the way. You receive your package a day later and forget all about the earlier hassle. In the end, it was just a mistake.

You are unaware of the terrifying thing happening in the background.

You've fallen for a classic package-delivery scam, and a form of "smishing," or SMS phishing. And you're not alone. One in three Americans have fallen victim to cybercrime, according to a 2023 poll. That's up from 1 in 4 in 2018. As cybersecurity researchers, we want to spread the word to help people protect themselves.

Old-fashioned threats haven't disappeared – identity thieves still steal wallets, dumpster dive for personal information and skim cards at ATMs – but the internet has made scamming easier than ever.

Digital threats include phishing attacks that use fake emails and websites, data breaches at major companies, malware that steals your information, and unsecured Wi-Fi networks in public places.

A whole new world of scams

Generative AI – which refers to artificial intelligence that generates text, images and other things – has improved dramatically over the past few years. That's been great for scammers trying to make a buck during the holiday season.

Consider online shopping. In some cases, scammers craft deepfake videos of fake testimonials from satisfied "customers" to trick unsuspecting shoppers. Scam victims can encounter these videos on cloned versions of legitimate sites, social media platforms, messaging apps and forums.

Scammers also generate AI-cloned voices of social media influencers appearing to endorse counterfeit products and create convincing but fraudulent shopping websites populated with AI-generated product photos and reviews. Some scammers use AI to impersonate legitimate brands through personalized phishing emails and fake customer service interactions. Since AI-generated content can appear remarkably authentic, it's become harder for consumers to distinguish legitimate online stores from sophisticated scam operations.

But it doesn't stop there. "Family emergency scams" exploit people's emotional vulnerability through deepfake technology. Scammers use AI to clone the voices of family members, especially children, and then make panic-inducing calls to relatives where they claim to be in serious trouble and need immediate financial help.

Some scammers combine voice deepfakes with AI-generated video clips showing the "loved one" in apparent distress. These manufactured emergency scenarios often involve hospital bills, bail money or ransom demands that must be paid immediately. The scammer may also use AI to impersonate authority figures like doctors, police officers and lawyers to add credibility to the scheme.

Since the voice sounds authentic and the emotional manipulation is intense, even cautious people can be caught off guard and make rushed decisions.

How to protect yourself

Protecting yourself against scams requires a multilayered defense strategy.

When shopping, verify retailers through official websites by checking the URL carefully – it should start with the letters "HTTPS" – and closely examining the site design and its content. Since fake websites often provide fake contact information, checking the "Contact Us" section can be a good idea. Before making purchases from unfamiliar sites, cross-reference the business on legitimate review platforms and verify their physical address.

It's essential to keep all software updated, including your operating system, browser, apps and antivirus software. Updates often include security patches that fix vulnerabilities hackers could exploit.

For more information on the importance of software updates and how to manage them, check out resources like StaySafeOnline or your device manufacturer's official website. Regular updates are a crucial step in maintaining a secure online shopping experience.

Make sure you only provide necessary information for purchases – remember, no one needs your Social Security number to sell you a sweater. And keeping an eye on your bank statements will help you catch any unauthorized activity early. It may seem like another chore, and it probably is, but this is the reality of our digital world.

To protect against family emergency scams, establish family verification codes, or a safe word, or security questions that only real family members would know. If you do get a distressed call from loved ones, remain calm and take time to verify the situation by contacting family members directly through known and trusted phone numbers. Educate your relatives about these scams and encourage them to never send money without first confirming the emergency with other family members or authorities through verified channels.

If you discover that your identity has been stolen, time is critical. Your first steps should be to immediately contact your banks and credit card companies, place a fraud alert with the credit bureaus, and file a report with the Federal Trade Commission and your local police.

In the following days, you'll need to change all passwords, review your credit reports, consider a credit freeze, and document everything. While this process can be overwhelming – and extremely cumbersome – taking quick action can significantly limit the damage.

Staying informed about AI scam tactics through reputable cybersecurity resources is essential. Reporting suspected scams to relevant authorities not only protects you, but it also helps safeguard others. A key takeaway is that staying vigilant is critical to defending against these threats.

Awareness helps communities push back against digital threats. More importantly, it's key to understand how today's scams aren't like yesteryear's.

Recognizing the signs of scams can provide stronger defense during this holiday season. And as you develop your threat identification techniques, don't forget to share with your family and friends.

Who knows? You could save someone from becoming a victim.

(Shaila Rana and Nelly Mulleneaux, Purdue University, The Conversation)

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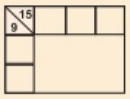
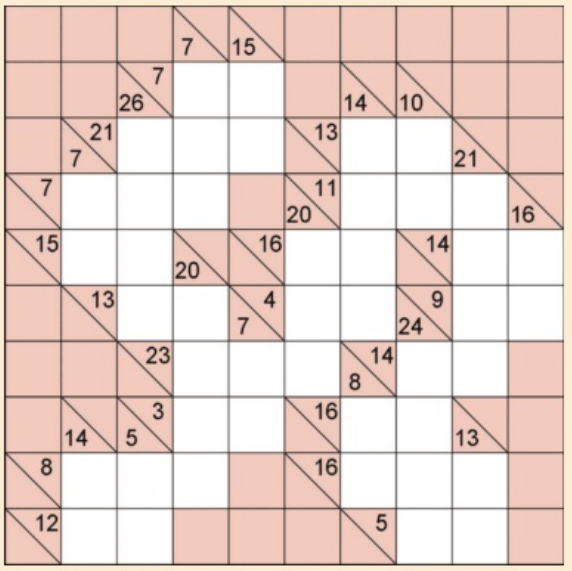
Kakuro

The numbers in the grey squares refer to the sums of the digits that you must fill into the empty spaces directly below or to the right of the grey square containing the number. For instance, in the given example, the 3 boxes horizontally next to 15 must contain 3 digits that add up to 15, whereas

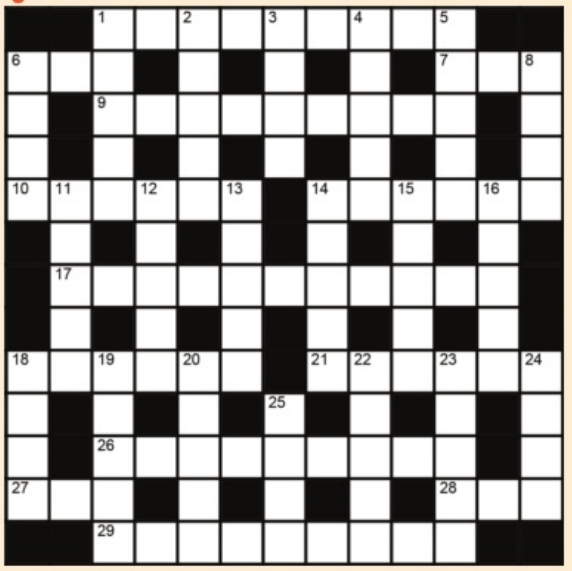


for 9, it is the 2 boxes placed vertically under it that must add up to 9. No zeros are used here, only the digits 1 through 9.

Note: A digit cannot appear more than once in any particular digit combination. For instance, in the example, we cannot have the combination of 4+7+4 for 15.



Quick



ACROSS

1 Submarine's "eye" (9)
6 In favour of (3)
7 Pinch or bite (3)
9 Large marsupials (9)
10 Marsh or bog? (6)
14 Small harbours (6)
17 Study of birds (11)
18 Column; post (6)
21 Adheres (6)
26 Restaurant at the Taj Gateway hotel known for its seafood (9)
27 An enemy (3)
28 Border (3)
29 Face or confront boldly; dare (5,2,2)

DOWN

1 Card game (5)
2 Tears or wrenches forcibly (5)
3 Washing substance (4)
4 A smell (5)
5 Follow (5)
6 Hair curling process (4)
8 ___ up / enthuses or elates (4)
11 Old Greek coins (5)
12 Cancel or abrogate (5)
13 Indian stringed instrument (5)
14 Intersect (5)
15 Intestinal bacteria (1,4)
16 Eskimo canoe (5)
18 Ill-gotten gain (4)
19 Finds pleasing (5)
20 Main artery (5)
22 Spring flower (5)
23 Capital of Egypt (5)
24 Thin (4)
25 Keen and eager (4)

Quoteuncode

This puzzle is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that Q equals C, it will equal C throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

Today's CLUE: O EQUALS D

SFEX PZY OZQ'X BUU SDXF PZYL UPUB, OZQ'X DQRUQX SDXF PZYL GZYXF.

Linemaro

I think you dropped something. (What?) Your standards. Nice to meet you

Mindchow

An acquaintance is someone we know well enough to borrow from, but not well enough to lend to

Joke of the day

My wife and I were camping, and an angry looking bear surprised us while we were eating. She looked at me and said "Should I give him some of the stew I made?" I said, "No, he looks angry enough already."

Loop

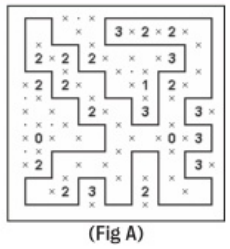
Rules

» Connect adjacent dots with vertical or horizontal lines, creating a single loop (Fig A). » Crossovers or branches are not allowed (As shown by dotted lines in Fig B). » Numbers in the puzzle indicate the number of lines that should surround it, while empty cells may be surrounded by any number of lines. » You can't draw lines around zeros. » Each puzzle has just one unique solution.

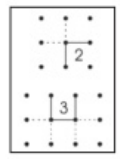
How to begin:

Example (Fig A) – Begin with the zero next to 3. Since no lines can be drawn around zero, mark crosses around it, as shown. Now there is a cross in one space around 3. So we know the three lines of 3 can only be drawn in the remaining three spaces. Next, these lines can only be extended in one direction each. Continue, using the same logic.

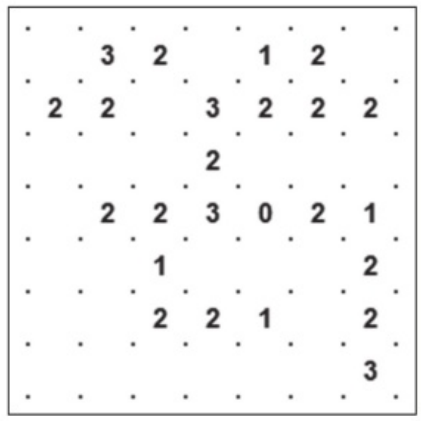
Hints: Keep eliminating possibilities by marking crosses in spaces between dots where a line isn't possible, i.e., if you have already completed required lines or where a line extension may create a branch or cause a dead-end (Fig B)



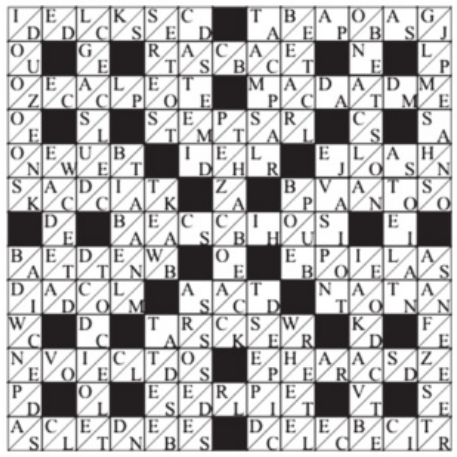
(Fig A)



(Fig B) Not Allowed



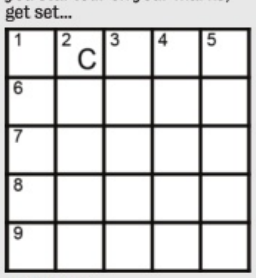
Strikeout



This crossword has no clues and the answer is there waiting for you. All you have to do is find it in each square. You have a choice of two letters, one of which you must strike out. If you choose correctly, you will be left with a grid that contains real words.

Fast five

How long do you think it will take you to unscramble the ten words shown below and fit them correctly into the grid in the order given one letter has already been entered to get you started? on your marks, get set...



ACROSS

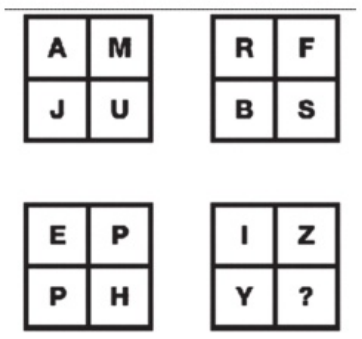
1 Cadet; 6 Or Egg; 7 Al Gem; 8 I sped; 9 Lsd mo

DOWN

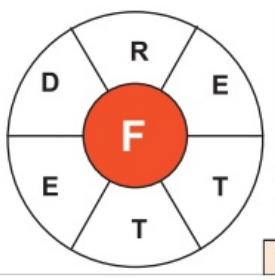
1 Sigma; 2 Cop mo; 3 Trial; 4 Deg e.g.; 5 See DD

Mensapuzzle

Which letter replaces the question mark and completes the sequence?



Bull's eye



How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown? Every word must contain the central letter. There should be one seven-letter word. British English Dictionary is used as a reference.

10 Average; 11 Good; 13 Outstanding

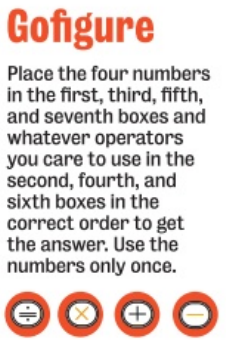
SudokuChallenge

6	5	1			9			2
			8	3				1
9			5		2	7	4	
8		2			4	1		
	7						6	
		6	3			5		9
	3	9	2		5			4
7				6	8			
5			4			2	1	7

To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from one to nine must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Gofigure

Place the four numbers in the first, third, fifth, and seventh boxes and whatever operators you care to use in the second, fourth, and sixth boxes in the correct order to get the answer. Use the numbers only once.



Hocusfocus

Find at least six differences in details between panels.

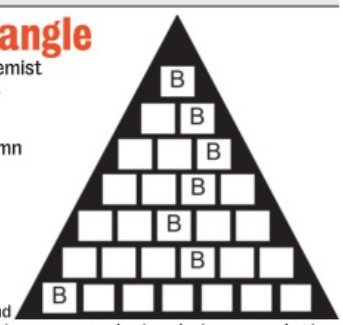
Differences: 1. Bat is missing. 2. Window is added. 3. Shoelace is added. 4. Arm of sofa is different. 5. Woman's hair is different. 6. Truck is different.

Riddler

I mark the time as you mark me, My life is forfeit annually. I'm often hung quite painlessly, Or carried by someone busy. Grandfather old, he is my cousin, When divided, I number one dozen. What am I?

Alpha triangle

1 Boron for the chemist
2 Obstetrics, abbr.
3 Deprive illegally
4 Spheres
5 Serious and solemn
6 Cold dessert
7 Annoys

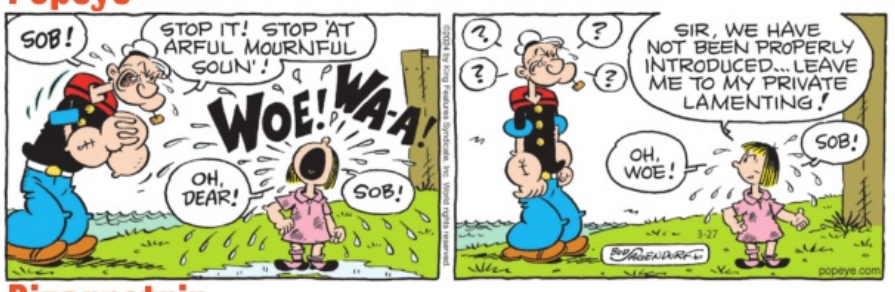


Beginning at the top move towards the bottom seven-letter word by adding a letter at each step and rearranging. A correct and different word must be made at each step answering to the clue given.

DIFFICULT TO SOLVE? FIND THESE SOLUTIONS ON THE NEXT PAGE

COMICS

Popeye

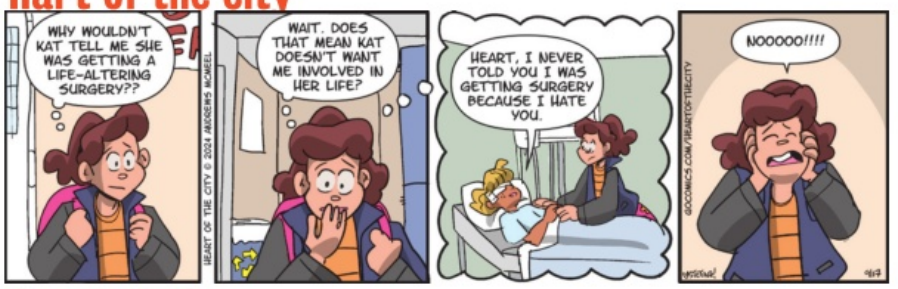


Bizarrotrip

Wayno & Piraro 9-17-24
BIZARRO.COM
They'll bargain on pay & healthcare, but they're balking at seventeen-year sabbaticals.
CICADA CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

Diamond Lil

Hart of the city


WHY WOULDN'T KAT TELL ME SHE WAS GETTING A LIFE-ALTERING SURGERY??
WAIT. DOES THAT MEAN KAT DOESN'T WANT ME INVOLVED IN HER LIFE?
HEART, I NEVER TOLD YOU I WAS GETTING SURGERY BECAUSE I HATE YOU.
NOOOOO!!!!
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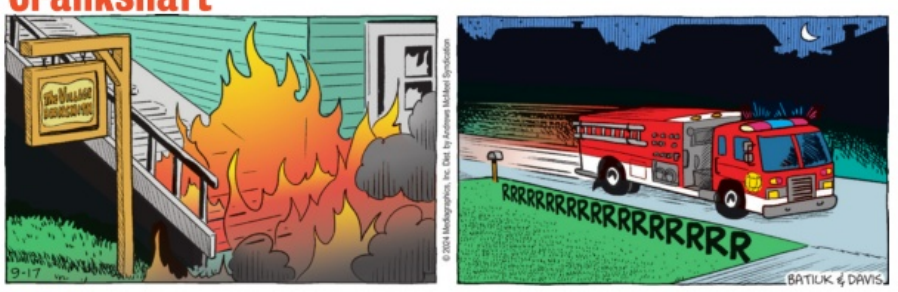
Crankshaft



Mutts

WHAT YOUR STARS SAY TODAY

Aries Mar 21 – Apr 20
Today, your job performance is likely to shine. Colleagues will be cooperative, helping you complete postponed projects on time. Lending money for investment purposes could be beneficial. Job seekers may find promising opportunities. Positive health news awaits those affected by lingering issues.

Taurus Apr 21 – May 20
Today, situations are beginning to improve, and people around you are becoming more responsive. However, you are advised not to see life as a burden and to maintain resilience in challenging situations. Elderly blessings may help you overcome obstacles. Confusion regarding your goals is likely to clear up.

Gemini May 21 – Jun 21
Today, incomplete tasks and mood swings may hinder your progress. Patience will be tested, and silly mistakes could confuse. Lovebirds may feel uncertain about their emotions, and high expectations could strain their relationship with their spouse. Take extra care of your parents, as students may struggle with focus.

Cancer Jun 22 – July 23
Today, you'll feel balanced in managing your earnings and expenses, boosting your finances. Your network will be instrumental in helping you implement plans. Siblings and subordinates will be supportive. You might also plan visits to elders or a religious place.

Leo Jul 24 – Aug 23
Today, your energy levels are high, filling you with happiness and optimism. Hard work will help you achieve your desires. Outings with friends and family will bring joy. Students are likely to receive positive news regarding their studies.

Virgo Aug 24 – Sep 23
The early part of the day might feel stressful and unsettling, but by afternoon, you'll regain happiness and confidence. Avoid making careless decisions regarding finances, profession, or studies. Be patient with your spouse to avoid turning good moments into sour ones. Lovebirds might plan short trips together.

Libra Sep 24 – Oct 22
Today, overspending may strain your savings. Be cautious in expressing yourself at work and home. Avoid lending money or making significant decisions regarding real estate and assets. Take care to fulfil your responsibilities rather than avoiding them.

Scorpio Oct 23 – Nov 22
Today, peace of mind will prevail. Investment plans in your business may enhance liquidity and boost your finances. Romantic moments with your spouse will foster family harmony. Singles may find a suitable match, and lovebirds could make marriage plans. Students will experience the rewards of their good karma.

Sagittarius Nov 23 – Dec 22
Today brings happiness as your losses turn into profits. Seniors may appreciate your work, potentially leading to changes in your position or responsibilities, possibly a promotion. Opponents and hidden enemies are under control. Singles and lovebirds may make important marriage decisions with the help of relatives or friends.

Capricorn Dec 23 – Jan 20
Today, blessings from the moon bring happiness and relief from last week's challenges. Your hard work will be rewarded. With the support of subordinates, you'll make progress on postponed tasks. Financial gains in business will strengthen your position.

Aquarius Jan 21 – Feb 19
Today, you may feel low and face health issues. It's advisable to postpone investments or new ventures, as losses in business are likely. Gains may turn into losses, so proceed cautiously.

Pisces Feb 20 – Mar 20
Today, you may receive profitable business orders for the future. New ideas at work could be successfully implemented, and potential partnerships may arise. However, a busy work schedule might cause mental fatigue, impacting your domestic life.

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P Hitakshi Bengaluru

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SOLUTIONS

SOLVE IN 1M
= 4·6/8·4
= 4·6/4·4·2·4
= 4·2/2·4
= 4·4/4·4
= 1

RIDDLER Calendar

QUOTE UNCODE
What you don't see with your eyes, don't invent with your mouth.

M	O	L	D	S		
I	M	A	G	E		
G	O	R	G	E		
A	C	T	E	D		

FAST FIVE

S	C	E	N	E	S	
P	L	E	E	R	I	E
E	V	I	C	T	S	
C	C	A	S	K	E	W
I	D	O	L	A	C	T
B	E	D	E	W	O	B
D	B	A	C	C	H	U
S	A	D	A	T	A	P
N	W	E	B	D	E	R
E	S	S	E	P	A	L
Z	E	A	L	O	T	M
D	E	C	K	E	D	T

STRIKE OUT

A	B	A	C	T	E	A
D	E	C	E	I	T	L
R	A	B	A	T	E	L
O	E	R	I	E	T	S
R	I	M	I	I	I	I
L	K	A	R	A	V	A
E	I	O	A	U	A	L
P	I	L	L	A	R	S
L	U	A	S	L	A	
O	R	N	I	T	H	O
B	N	I	R	C	A	
M	O	R	A	S	S	C
R	E	D	P	U	P	
E	K	A	N	G	A	R
P	R	O	E	O	D	N

QUICK

P	E	R	I	S	C	O
F	O	E	T	I	I	R
E	I	O	A	U	A	L
P	I	L	L	A	R	S
L	U	A	S	L	A	
O	R	N	I	T	H	O
B	N	I	R	C	A	
M	O	R	A	S	S	C
R	E	D	P	U	P	
E	K	A	N	G	A	R
P	R	O	E	O	D	N

MENSA PUZZLE
K. Start with the top left hand segment of the top left hand square, and move around the other squares in a clockwise direction. Letters are written in sequence in steps of 5 letters at a time for the top left segment, 6 letters for the top right, 7 for the bottom right and 8 for the bottom left. The relative positions of the letters in each sequence move 1 segment clockwise at every step.

6	5	1	7	4	9	3
2	4	7	8	3	6	9
9	8	3	5	1	2	7
8	9	2	6	5	4	1
3	7	5	9	2	1	4
4	1	6	3	8	7	5
1	3	9	2	7	5	6
7	2	4	1	6	8	3
5	6	8	9	3	2	4

SUDOKU

ALPHA TRIANGLE
8, OB, Rob, Orbs, Sober, Sorbet, Bolters.

GO FIGURE
Easy
2 × 2 + 3 + 3 = 10
Medium
9 + 5 + 8 + 7 = 29
Hard
5 – 6 + 9 × 3 = 24

LOOP

KAKURO

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Secret part— The Cuban-American actress Ana de Armas is currently in talks for a secret part in the upcoming superhero movie 'Avengers: Doomsday'

Just a teaser

Rashmika shares birthday wishes for on-screen boyfriend

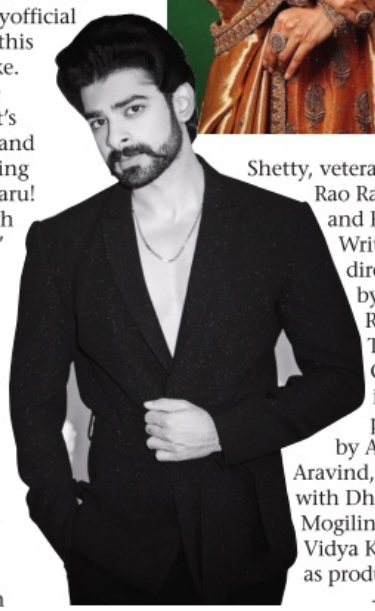
Rashmika Mandanna, known for her hit film Pushpa 2 and dating rumours with Vijay Deverakonda, recently shared a sweet birthday message for her on-screen boyfriend, Dheekshith Shetty, co-star of The Girlfriend. This came after the teaser of the film was released.

On Sunday, Rashmika took to her Instagram story to share a poster of her co-star Dheekshith Shetty from their film The Girlfriend. She wished him a happy birthday with a heartfelt note, saying, "The boyfriend of The Girlfriend! Wishing you the happiest birthday, Dheekshith! God bless you with everything you desire. You're truly a gem, and I always wish the best for you."

Dheekshith Shetty is a Kannada actor, recognized by Telugu audiences for his role as Suri in Dasara, alongside Nani and Keerthy Suresh. He plays the male lead in The Girlfriend, where he stars opposite Rashmika Mandanna.

'The Girlfriend' director Rahul Ravindran also wished Dheekshith on his birthday. Sharing his character poster from the film, he praised his talent and wrote, "Wishing a super happy birthday to the incredibly talented @dheekshithshettyofficial And I don't say this for formality sake. He's an absolute top tier talent! It's been a pleasure and a privilege working with you hero garu! #HBDDheekshith #TheGirlfriend."

Rashmika released the teaser of The Girlfriend on December 9, which became even more special with a voiceover by her rumoured boyfriend, Vijay Deverakonda. The film also stars Dheekshith Shetty, veteran actors Rao Ramesh and Rohini. Written and directed by Rahul Ravindran, The Girlfriend is presented by Allu Aravind, with Dheeraj Mogilineni and Vidya Koppineedi as producers.



— ETimes

SANDALWOOD SHOTS

Y MAHESWARA REDDY

Shivanna's new movie

Karunada Chakravarthy Dr Shivarajkumar, who is in the USA for treatment, is set to play the lead in #MB that is bankrolled by Manoj Banode and Khame Chand Khadgi under the ADD-ONE Films banner. N Maharajan, known for handling megaphone for Tamil movies Vallarasu and Arasaktchi, and the Hindi movie Indian, debuts as a director in Sandalwood with #MB.

Dr Shivarajkumar's movie 45 is also scheduled for release shortly.

#MB is expected to go on floors next year. #MB will be the maiden movie for producers Manoj Banode and Khame Chand Khadgi in Kannada. "I am very happy to make my debut in Sandalwood as a producer. It gives me immense pleasure to have Dr Shivarajkumar on the board and the movie will be made in six languages," said Banode.

The director will reveal more details about the movie, its title, and cast and crew in the coming days.

Double role

Actor-cum-director Harish Raj, known for Kalaakaar, Sri Satyanarayana, Khiladi Police, and Pretha, is once again playing a double role – of protagonist and director – for the movie Venkateshaya Namaha.

"We have completed around 50 percent of the shooting. We plan to wrap up the shooting in 35 to 40 days. The entire shooting of the movie will be held in Bengaluru. It is a romantic comedy and has a much-needed message to couples who breakup at trivial reasons. I play a disappointed lover who later decides to have fun with girls but ends up falling in love with one of the seven girls," Harish Raj said.

He said Venkateshaya Namaha is his 10th movie as a director. "I began my career as a director with Kalaakaar. My previous movie as a director and hero was Pretha. I have played the villain in Malayalam movies Irupathionnaam Noottandu, CBI 5, and B. Tech and Tamil movie Enda. I have been busy with other language movies after acting in Pretha," he said.

The ensemble of cast of his latest film includes Prakruthi Prasad, Umashree, Tabala Nani with a host of newcomers. "The movie has a tagline – Maththe Pyarge Aagbittaite. It is a work of fiction but recent incidents in Bengaluru are the inspiration for this movie," he said.

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